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Parent Focus

February 2005

Behavior and Communication

by Merv Blunt, Central Office

One of the most effective ways to communicate a message is through behavior. You hand a book to a small child and the child pushes it away. The behavior is communicating he does not want the book. A child takes you by the hand and leads you to the refrigerator; the child is hungry. A child is crying; the child is unhappy. All the behaviors we see in children, teens and adults communicate a message to us.

One of the beliefs at State Schools for Severely Handicapped (SSSH) is that "All behavior serves a purpose," and that purpose is communication. Many of the students at State Schools have limited communications skills and thus have difficulty in expressing themselves. Therefore, a student uses any effective form of communication possible to get his message across to others. It is very common for students at SSSH to use their behaviors to communicate. Sometimes the behavior is very subtle, other times the behavior can be aggressive or socially unacceptable. When a student uses a behavior for communication, the behavior communicates one of two basic messages: "I want something" or "I want to get away from something."

If your child becomes aggressive or exhibits a socially unacceptable behavior, how do you make it stop or go away? Typical responses from an adult would be to tell the child "No", or to take away something the child likes, or to respond in physical way, such as making the child sit in a quiet corner. These responses may stop the behavior for a while, but eventually the same behavior will return or a new behavior will take its place.

Why does a child continue to exhibit a behavior that is not appropriate, or is a socially unacceptable way of communicating a message? The child has learned that the behavior works better than any other form of communication he has tried. A behavior will only continue to occur if the behavior accomplishes what the child is seeking.

When the adult uses traditional responses to manage an inappropriate behavior, they never find out what the behavior was communicating. To really understand why the behavior is happening we must know what the child is communicating.

Remember, a behavior in one situation may communicate a different message than in another situation. As an example, knocking things off the kitchen table may mean "I'm done," knocking things off the coffee table may mean "Stop watching TV and pay attention to me," and knocking things off the desk at school may mean "I don't want to do this anymore."

A simplified process for managing behavior in a more positive manner.

1. First, select a behavior:
 - a. Don't start with the most difficult or severe behavior.
 - b. Start with a simple behavior, so both you and your child can be successful.
2. Decide why the behavior is happening, what message is being communicated:
 - a. To get something or to get away from something.
 - b. Also, are adult actions or demands too strict or demanding, and is a compromise needed?
3. Find a better way for the student to communicate the message:
 - a. The new way must be as effective and as fast as the current behavior. If not, the child will revert to the old behavior and not use the new way.
4. Teach the new way to your child:
 - a. You will have to set up situations and prompt or help your child through the process.
 - b. This way your child learns to be successful, and can see the new way of communicating is more powerful and useful than the old behavior.

(Continued on page 2)

5. Help your child use the new behavior in typical situations:
 - a. You must remain calm and prompt your child to use his new form of communication.
 - b. You must understand that your child will not use the new way to communicate all the time.
 - c. Your child will need to learn that this way is the best way to communicate.

Example of implementing the new behavior

Your child is constantly knocking things off the coffee table. You have tried the old traditional approach, told him to stop, or threatened him, or took away something he likes, or used “time out,” but the behavior still continues, no matter what you do.

► What is the message?

The most difficult part is trying to figure out the message. It is useful to remember that the basic messages are either your child wants something or wants to get away from something. The problem is deciding what he really wants or what he wants to get away from. In this example, let’s guess the message is “I want you to pay more attention to me.” This may sound odd, but many children want any type of attention they can get, even if it is negative attention. Since this behavior has been constantly occurring, it means that the behavior is working for your child, because you consistently direct your attention away from your activity and respond to him.

► Decide on a new way to communicate your child’s message.

One new way of communicating could be having your child bring you a card with a picture of two people on it; this card means “I want to play or have more attention from you”. Explain and demonstrate to your child that when he gives you the card you will stop what you are doing, and the two of you will play for five minutes. You will set a timer to indicate the end of play time.

► Practice the new behavior until your child uses it most of the time.

Initially, your child may continue to knock something off the coffee table. You must continue to teach and show your child that he achieves the intent of his communication (getting to play) most effectively if he uses the card system. You need to focus on teaching the new behavior, and avoid commenting on the old behavior. If your child knocks things off the coffee table, quickly hand him the card and help him hand the card to you. Then say: “Oh, you want to play, let’s go play” and go play. Don’t say anything about what has been knocked off the table. Don’t make him pick it up. You want him to see that the card will get him what he wants, which is your attention. It will take many times to change the old behavior. You need to remain calm during this process and provide opportunities for your child to be successful.

► Extending the process.

Your child may seek your attention at other times during the day. By having these cards all over the house, your child can get to them quickly and easily and use them to communicate a need for attention when you are busy with something else. If your child has to look for a card and it takes too long, he will revert to the old way to communicate what he wants.

The two questions parents ask when they are thinking about implementing this type of positive support

- Q:** *How do I know when my child is going to exhibit either aggression or a socially unacceptable behavior? My child’s behavior just comes out of the blue without a warning.*
- A:** Typically, there are some warning signs that a behavior is about to occur. It may be that we are so used to seeing behaviors throughout the day that we don’t make the connection. It may be that your child exhibits some passive types of behaviors and then escalates very quickly to either aggression or a socially unacceptable behavior. Your child may start to get antsy and squirm around, or he gets up and paces. These could be warning signs that something is about to happen. If you can discover these warning signs, then you can quickly provide the positive support needed and the inappropriate behavior will not occur.

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Parent Focus

February 2005

State Schools for
Severely Handicapped
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The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education complies with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Civil Rights Act of 1991, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended, and the Americans With Disabilities Act. Services are provided without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, or physical or mental disability.

Information concerning other available resources, programs, etc., is not to be construed as an endorsement by State Schools for Severely Handicapped for any specific product, organization or philosophy.

Working With Your Child's Teacher

by Janelle Burch,
Supervisor for Instruction

When planning the IEP for the coming year, the teacher will ask for information from you to help determine skills to teach. The teacher may send home a written survey, or discuss this with you when she calls to set up the IEP meeting. This is the opportunity to share your child's behavioral concerns with the teacher. In the classroom they may be using positive supports that are improving your child's behaviors.

In the survey or during the phone call, tell the teacher about the behavior challenges you face at home or in the community. The teacher wants to know what your needs are. This will help the teacher better address skills that will be appropriate for your child in all environments. By thinking through situations, the teacher will be able to identify skills to teach at school that will help the student be successful in home and community situations.

The teacher can also share the classroom skills with you, and give you tips on how to implement these skills yourself at home. Below are a few examples of common situations and the steps you can take to help your child develop better responses in difficult situations.

- Does your child have difficulty waiting while you prepare dinner in the evening?
- Is eating out in a restaurant with the family an enjoyable experience?
- Can you take your child to the store with you and get your shopping done without incidents?

Evening meal

Behavior:

Child can't wait or entertain self while the meal is being prepared. May scream and grab everything in sight.

Possible causes:

- Bored
- Needs attention
- Wants to be somewhere else
- Wants to be doing something else
- Wants you to be doing something else

Positive support strategy:

- Gather some materials that will be used only during meal preparation time.
- Let your child select an item to play with while you are preparing the meal.
- Set a timer to remind you to check and see if your child is getting tired of the item.
- The timer should be set so your child can be successful sitting at the table playing with the item. This could range from a minute to 10 minutes or more.
- When the timer goes off, give your child some attention and see if she wants to keep the item she has or get a new one. Then set the timer again.
- While preparing the meal, engage your child in conversation. Let her choose some part of the meal, such as deciding between green beans or corn.

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State Schools for Severely Handicapped

"Beliefs"

1. All children can learn.
2. All learning can be measured.
3. Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
4. Educators have the ability to influence community attitudes regarding people with disabilities.
5. All skills, teaching materials and instructional settings must be consistent with the student's chronological age and functional to the person outside of the school setting.
6. Everyone has something to communicate.
7. All behavior serves a purpose.
8. A person is more than his or her disability.
9. Parents and educators play a critical role in the lives of children.

☆ Behavior/Communication (From page 2)

Q: Aren't we giving in to what the child wants?

A: On the surface it appears that way. In fact most parents don't realize that responding to the old behavior also gives the child what he wants. Example: The parent may want the child to be able to sit quietly for 15 minutes while the parent watches TV. The child can't do it and becomes aggressive after five minutes. When this happens, everyone stops watching TV and turns their attention to the child. The child is now in control and has achieved what he wanted. He has everyone's attention and no one is watching TV!

By compromising, everyone can be successful and have a win-win situation. If you discover your child can only sit for five minutes while you watch TV, tell your child that you are going to set the timer for five minutes and watch TV. When the timer goes off, you are going to stop watching TV, and set the timer for five minutes' play with your child. Then repeat the process. After this has worked for a while, slowly increase the amount of time the child has to sit and wait, and then later you can decide if you want to decrease the amount of time you play with your child.

When using positive supports, a behavior is very rarely changed immediately. However, with opportunities for your child to be successful and consistent use of the positive supports, your child will learn a more appropriate way to communicate his wants and needs, and the inappropriate behaviors will be replaced with appropriate and socially acceptable behaviors. ■

Eating out (fast food restaurant) Eating inside restaurant

Behavior:

Child yells, runs around restaurant, grabs things.

Possible causes:

- Too many distractions
- Meal takes too long – can't wait
- Too much stimulation

Positive support strategy:

Two different versions of doing this, depending on how your reacts to situation.

1. Extreme situation – child can sit only for a minute or less
 - Go during non-busy time.
 - Get one item for child.
 - Sit down either in quiet non-crowded area inside or go outside to tables.
 - When child has finished eating, it is time to go.
 - Praise child.
2. Can sit and wait but not through a whole meal
 - Go during non-busy time
 - Get one item for child
 - Sit down either in quiet non-crowded area inside or go outside to tables.
 - Give your child a little of his food at a time.
Example: You hold the bag of fries and place two or three fries at a time on a napkin for your child. As soon as he picks up the fries to eat, you put another few fries on the napkin. Your child should always have a little food in front of him.
 - When child has finished eating, it is time to go.
 - Praise child.

After two successful visits using the above procedure, take longer and longer to give small portions of food to your child, so that he learns to wait for food. Eventually, add more items to your child's meal at the restaurant. Then you will be able to order something to eat there. When your child has finished eating, it is time to go. Take your leftovers with you.

Slowly add time for your child to wait, by giving him something to do or play with, until you have enough time to finish eating your meal.

Going to the grocery store

Behavior:

Grabs things off the shelf when walking through the store with mom.

Possible Causes:

- Too many distractions and too much stimulation. Can't focus.
- Not interested in walking through store.
- Wants more individual attention.

Positive support strategy:

- Prepare your child for the activity. Tell her a story with pictures (even if they are stick figures) about what you are getting ready to do and what the expectation will be. "We are going to the store. We will get out of the car and walk through the door, get a cart. I will get milk and bread and you will get a box of pudding, then we will pay and carry our sack to the car."
- Practice first with very short trips. Go in the store, pick up two or three things, let your child pick up her item, then leave.
- Walk with her holding on to the cart handle or have her help push the cart.
- She may hold onto a favorite item or a small basket to carry her purchase.
- Make a picture list of item(s) she will shop for. As you come to the appropriate section of the store, let her take the item from the shelf and put it into her basket. Take the picture of the item off her list or cross it off.
- Where possible, let your child choose the flavor of the item she is purchasing.
- Praise your child as you leave the store.

As your child is successful, gradually increase the number of items you and she purchase on each shopping trip.

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FOCUS ON READING

by Debby Lucast, Principal, Helen M. Davis State School



The students, staff and families of Helen Davis School took an active step in promoting reading this school year. Pizza Hut agreed with the school that all Helen Davis students would be eligible to be included in the “Book-It” program sponsored by the restaurant.

Parents were given reading logs to track the number of minutes and/or pages they read to their child each month. The titles of the books read were listed on the log. The goal for each student was to participate in reading activities at home for 8 hours every month. When a student and their family met their personal goal, they were rewarded with coupons from Pizza Hut, a free child’s meal at Applebee’s, and free ice cream from a local shop.

Whether or not your State School has a similar reading program, we encourage you to take time to involve your child in reading at home. Here are some ideas:

- Take your child to the local library regularly and let your child select books that interest him.
- Libraries are a good resource for books on tape or CD.
- Build up a library at home. Buy books at garage or rummage sales. Ask relatives to give your child books as a gift. Take advantage of any book fair offered at your child’s school.
- Share the newspaper with your child. Find the sections that interest him. Commonly, students are attracted to the ads. sections, particularly for food, toys and vehicles. The grocery sections can be used to help your student make a shopping list for the family. Some students like the sports sections and are eager to find out how their “team” is doing.
- Subscribe to magazines with topics that your child likes. Many teenage students like fashion magazines. National Geographic’s children’s magazines, “World” and “Kids”, are also popular. The Missouri Department of Conservation distributes “Missouri Conservationist” free. Request a subscription by writing to: Circulation, P.O. Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180 and supplying your name and address. This is a good magazine for students who like fishing.
- LeapFrog’s LeapPad and similar reading systems let your child select stories and have them read by the system while turning the pages of the book. The age range of books available is continually increasing.
- Sit with your child and read with him often. If he has some reading ability, let him read to you or verbally tell you the story.
- Expand your child’s horizons by reading age-appropriate articles and books on a wide variety of topics. The intermediate students at Helen Davis are currently listening to the Laura Ingalls Wilder “Little House on the Prairie” series.
- Set up a family night for reading, where every member of the family takes turns to choose a book or article and share it with the family. ■

In addition to the situations listed on pages 3 and 4, practice the following positive support strategies to make a difference in the way your child responds to difficult situations:

- Increase your child's control and choices
 - Reinforce good choices and add new activities.
- Praise frequently
 - Don't ignore your child if she is being good.
 - If ignored for being good, she will get your attention by going back to negative behaviors.
- Let your child be a helper
 - This provides your attention to the child in a positive way and your child is learning something useful to her in other settings
- Reinforce tasks attempted/done well
 - Any type of success should be reinforced.
- Decrease length of activity (example: sitting at dinner with family)
 - Start with a length of time your child can manage.
 - Slowly add more time, but don't rush it.

Reinforcements for your child may vary. The key is that the reinforcement comes soon after the good behavior you are encouraging. Here are some ideas:

- verbal praise or attention
- immediate food reinforcements (small pieces of any food item your child likes)
- specific activities your child enjoys, such as visiting the ice-cream store after a shopping trip, or watching a favorite video or listening to music after successfully following a new behavior at home.

Building good behavior will be more long lasting than trying to control inappropriate behaviors. People who develop appropriate behaviors from positive behavioral supports improve their confidence and self esteem and increase their independence. Remember that a person can be successful in any environment if they have the right support. ■

Seasonal Sensory House Fun!

*by Staff at Shady Grove
State School*

Shady Grove students and parents had a big surprise during Open House in October 2004. Besides visiting with teachers, staff and touring classrooms, parents and students were invited to the "Seasonal" Sensory House, which was the idea of Rhoda Carihfield, teacher, and Kim Galloway and Linda Jackson, classroom staff.

To create the sensory house, the staff brought in two pop-up tents and various articles to put inside and outside the house. Plastic sheeting and cobwebbed netting were used to create walls for the tents and a walkway between the two tented areas. Other staff members of the school and young adult students pitched in to put the house together. The young adults helped by following directions in peeling grapes for "slimy eyeballs." Students also helped in the placement of lighting and other sensory objects needed for touch or tracking.

The young adult class hosted tours of the sensory house for three separate groups. A young adult student volunteered to be the guide through the house for all these groups:

- ✓ Each classroom at Shady Grove had the opportunity to experience this house. Students touring were able to use their hands to differentiate between objects and texture, such as touching the itchy bitsy spiders and the candy worms. Some objects were activated by vocalization, such as the singing, dancing skeleton. Students had to feel their way through "creepy cob webs" and track the staring eyeballs.
- ✓ The parents, together with their children, visited during Open House on October 26, 2004.
- ✓ Shady Grove invited students from the Twin Rivers High School Beta Club for a "Seasonal" get-together. On October 29, 2004, the Shady Grove students took turns inviting their high school counterparts to tour the house with them. This was a fun way to take advantage of the season and to integrate students from the public school with Shady Grove students. ■

What is Sensory Integration?

by Merv Blunt,
Central Office

RESOURCES

★ Sensory Integration

Web sites:

www.spednetwork.org
www.sensoryresources.com

★ Book:

"The Out-of-Sync Child"
by Carol Kranowitz
– Helpful for parents of individuals with autism and also those having sensory-motor integration disorders (no autism).

★ Sensory Integration Parent Support Groups:

* Harrisburg, Missouri
Host: Cinda Hudlow
harrisburggroup@yahoo.com

• St. Charles, Missouri
Host: Robin Shepard
rlshep2@yahoo.com
Where: United Methodist Church of the Sepherd
When: Second Tuesday of every month, 7 p.m.

Sensory Integration is the ability to take in information through the senses (touch, movement, smell, taste, vision and hearing) and to put it together with other information, memories and knowledge already in the brain and make a meaningful response. Dr. Jean Ayers, occupational therapist, describes a problem with sensory integration as being like a "traffic jam" in the brain. Some bits of sensory information are "tied up in traffic," and the information does not get to the parts of the brain that need the information.

One of the primary issues in sensory integration is not waiting until your child is out of control, but using the sensory integration methods to allow your child to be ready to participate in an activity, to be alert and to be better able to manage behaviors.

State Schools use their occupational therapists as a resource to help decide if a child has a need for sensory integration and what sensory techniques should be used with the child. Please talk to your child's teacher or occupational therapist for more information on sensory integration and to find out whether your child needs this. If sensory integration would be helpful for your child, follow the recommended strategies. If the wrong strategy is used, it can have a negative effect on your child's sensory response.

Examples of two sensory integration areas with possible problems and solutions

Sense	Possible strategies to increase sensory integration
Vestibular – sense of movement and gravity <i>Typical behaviors of child:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-stimulation • Decrease in attention span • Decrease in concentration • Spinning • Rocking • Poor balance • Avoids play that involves movement • Cries when moved around when dressing • Falls when trying to wash lower extremities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Slide play. 2. Swinging in a blanket or hammock. 3. Riding various vehicles: tricycles, bikes, scooters. 4. Trampoline jumping. 5. Walking on unstable surfaces – this requires adjustment of body movements for maintaining balance. 6. Swinging on swings – encourage but never force this! This movement can be therapeutic but, if gravitational insecurity is an issue, keep the swing low so the child's feet can touch the ground. 7. Spinning on a tire swing or merry-go-round. Monitor, as this can be over-stimulating. 8. Rocking chairs. 9. Teeter-totters, seesaws. 10. Somersaults, stair-climbing, jogging.
Proprioceptive – knowing where your body is in space <i>Typical behaviors of child:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seen as clumsy • Jumps and walks heavy • Hugging too tight • Drops things • Fatigues before task is completed • Props head up while eating or doing other activities • Moves arms and hands in repetitive movements • Misses when placing arm or leg in clothing 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Carrying heavy loads: books, pails of sand, backpack. 2. Pushing and pulling: vacuum, doors, wheelbarrows, boxes. 3. Pillow crashing: diving, jumping, rolling into large beanbag chairs or pillows. 4. Bear hugs. 5. Tug-of-war: while sitting, standing, kneeling. 6. Arm wrestling. 7. Leapfrog. 8. Ripping paper, stuffing garbage bags with newspaper, etc. 9. Squeezing gel balls, stapling with or without staples, using a hole punch. 10. Pressing bubble paper. 11. Wearing a weighed vest. 12. Using a weighted blanket. <p>(See instructions for making weighted vests and blankets on page 9.)</p>

By recognizing the need to implement one of these strategies prior to an activity which you know will be likely to stress your child or before your child hits sensory overload, you increase the chances that he will be able to participate appropriately or keep calm. Example: letting your child sit with a small weighted lap blanket for twenty minutes on the journey to a restaurant may assist your child in staying calm during the family meal. The teacher and occupational therapist can guide you on the length of time to use the strategy, and with the weighted items, the amount of weight to use and its distribution on the body. Children who realize they are more in control after using one of these strategies will tend to seek them out

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when they realize they are about to become out of control. They may move towards their tricycle, go sit in their rocking chair or fetch their weighted vest.

Other Ways to Help Your Child Cope with Sensory Integration Problems

► Pay Attention

- Remember your child's problem is physical, she can't help this 'traffic jam in the brain.'
- Tune into the kinds of sensory stimulation your child avoids or craves.
- Identify your child's temperament. What is the intensity of reaction? Is she outgoing or somewhat shy? Does she like to try new activities or prefer to stay with activities she knows well?

► Anticipate Responses

Help your child to recognize when she may be in emotional crisis. If the situation is becoming tense, allow her to either remove herself or help her find an activity which may alleviate the intensity or negative emotion. By anticipating potentially strong reactions, you may be able to diffuse emotionally packed situations.

► Empathize

Identify your child's emotions; tell her you understand what she may be feeling and demonstrate how she may cope with this feeling.

► Provide Structure

Keep routines and schedules as consistent as possible and try to warn your child in advance about the transition of activities.

► Have Realistic Expectations

Expect inconsistency. Things that over-stimulate one day may not have the same impact on another day.

► Slow Down The Pace!

By slowing down the pace of movement, speech and touch, the strain of processing is reduced. ■

TECHNOLOGY

PlayStation and Game Boy Adapters

Toys for Special Children from Enabling Devices offers two products that make age-appropriate games more accessible.

PlayStation Control Center (#4037) \$114.95 — This control center works with PlayStation and PlayStation 2. The game disk is dropped into the PlayStation and the controller is plugged into the Control Center. The user operates the game using one of the four positions on each of the two large yellow disks. The system can be used by one or two players. The Web site lists the games compatible with the Control Center.

Game Boy Adapter (#4034) \$129.95 — This adapter works with Game Boy Advance SP. The players need either four ability switches or a joystick switch to operate the adapter. These switches are sold separately or in combination packs: Adapter and four Button Click Switches (#4035) \$199.95, or Adapter with Joystick Switch (#4036) \$199.95. The Game Boy slides into the adapter. It can also be used by one or two players. Look at the Web site for games suitable for the adapter.

For more details, call 1-800-832-8697 at Enabling Devices, 385 Warburton Avenue, Hastings-on-Hudson, NY 10706, or visit their Web site at www.enablingdevices.com. ■

Public Libraries Accessing the Internet

If you don't have access to the internet at home or through family or friends, you can go online at your local public library. If you are not familiar with operating a computer or searching the internet, a librarian can guide you through the process. ■

Making Weighted Vests or Blankets

by Stephanie Brooks,
Central Office

(Patterns copyright
2002 Project ACCESS/
Evelyn Short)

As mentioned in the article on sensory integration, page 7, you should only use these items with your child if the classroom teacher and/or occupational therapist indicate that your child will benefit from their use. The school can guide you on the length of time to use each item and also the ideal amount of weight to use and best positioning for the weights on the vest.

Weighted Vest

The easiest way to make this is to buy a new or used vest which will fit your child. If you are able to sew, use a standard pattern to make a vest from heavy material such as denim or corduroy. The vest should have pockets sewn on both sides of the front (see diagram below) with flaps that can be closed shut with Velcro.

The weights can be added in several ways:

- Fill small Ziploc bags with dried beans or rice and put in the pockets. This is an easy solution if your child will leave the bags alone and not try to move them, open them or eat the contents.
- Sew small bean or rice bags to put in the pockets. This solution works with children who will open Ziploc bags.
- Sew heavy drapery or fishing weights into the pockets and leave in place for laundering.
- Make a narrow band of material to run across the width of the inside of the vest, and sew weights inside the band. Attach the band to the vest using Velcro on the band and vest.

When laundering the vest, remove all bean or rice weights, and the inside band if used.

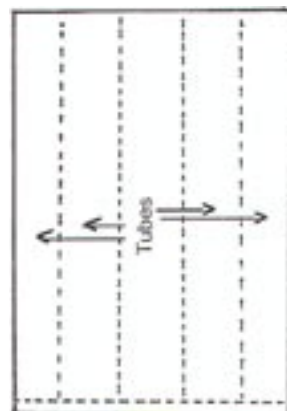
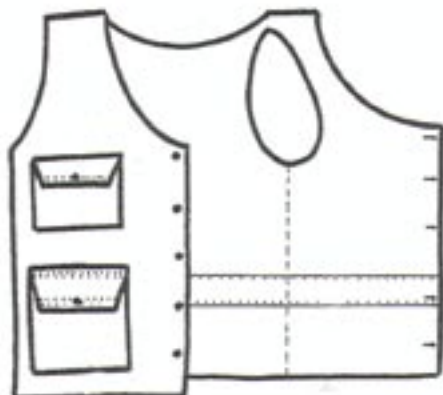
Weighted Blanket

These blankets can vary in size. Commercial vendors of blankets typically offer larger blankets measuring 44 x 72 inches and smaller blankets in the 36 x 42 inch range. Lap blankets are usually around 12 x 24 inches. The amount of weight in the blankets should be tailored to the needs of your child, but is usually 10-12 lbs. for large blankets, 4-8 lbs. for smaller blankets and 3 lbs. for the lap versions.

For a small blanket, measuring about 36 x 36 inches, use 2 yards of soft, washable material. Cut into two even sized pieces and sew along three of the sides, leaving one side open. Turn the fabric inside out and sew four seams lengthwise as shown on the diagram, and sew across the bottom one inch. Leave the top one inch open. This will make five tubes running down the blanket.

To weight the blanket, you have an option of filling the tubes with cloth fillers (old socks, rags, etc.) or with polystyrene pellets. You may need a long stick to push the cloth fillers down the tubes, and a funnel is useful for filling the tubes with pellets. When the tubes are filled, sew the top seam closed.

The blanket can be laundered with these fillers inside, but you may find it takes time to completely dry. Another option is to make the blanket as indicated above, and then make a separate cover to pull over it. It is useful to sew Velcro on the corners of the weighted blanket and inside the cover in the same areas to secure the cover to the blanket. The opening of the cover can also be closed by using Velcro. When dirty, the cover is removed and laundered, but not the blanket itself. If you use this method, you can also consider using beans or rice as weights. ■



Obesity in Children

by Claudia Rampley,
Central Office

In the United States, between five and twenty-five percent of children and teenagers are obese. Obesity is defined as an excessive accumulation of body fat. Childhood obesity is the leading cause of pediatric hypertension; is associated with type II diabetes mellitus; increases the risks of coronary heart disease; and increases stress on the weight-bearing joints.

Reaching and maintaining an appropriate body weight is important. The healthiest way to change body weight is gradually. Recommendations that focus on small permanent changes in eating may work better than a series of short-term changes that can't be sustained.

Here are some ways that you can establish a lifetime of healthy habits for you and your family:

- Limit the amount of TV watching
- Make time for the entire family to participate in regular physical activities that everyone enjoys
- Implement the same healthy diet (rich in fruits, vegetables and grains) for the entire family, not just for selected individuals
- Eat meals together at the dinner table at regular times
- Avoid foods that are high in calories, fat or sugar
- Have snack foods available that are low in calories and nutritious, such as fruit, vegetables and yogurt
- Plan lower fat meals
- Encourage children to eat a wide variety of foods in moderation
- Do not encourage children to continue eating or "to clean their plate" when they are truly no longer hungry
- Do not use food as a reward for an accomplishment, a substitute for love or compensation for a disappointment.

The importance of continuing these lifestyle changes well past the initial treatment period should be emphasized to the entire family.

Obese children are more likely to be obese adults. Successfully preventing or treating obesity in childhood may reduce the risk of adult obesity. This may help reduce the risk of heart disease and other diseases.

Please call your child's school nurse if you have any questions or concerns about your child's weight. ■

TRANSPORTATION

Working Together:

Transporting our Students Safely and Efficiently

by Stephanie Brooks,
Central Office

A combined effort by the bus contractors and state-employed bus teams, our schools, parents and other caregivers, ensures all our students are transported safely and efficiently every day. This article describes what to expect from the transportation service and also outlines the assistance we need from parents.

The bus team:

- A driver and attendant on every route.
- The bus team is trained on common medical procedures (CPR, using asthma inhalers, oxygen, etc.) and on specific medical procedures for certain students (such as dealing with seizures).
- The bus team is familiar with emergency evacuation drills.
- The driver and attendant are professional in all communications with parents and students. In particular, the team maintains confidentiality about all students. The bus team may tell parents anything that arose during the journey concerning their student. However, the bus team does not discuss the behavior of other students on the route or at school, nor does the team comment on the type of day the student had at school. (The teacher can communicate this in a note to the home sent with the student.)
- The driver and attendant work as a team loading and unloading students in wheelchairs, with the attendant on the outside of the bus and the driver inside at the top of the lift.

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Calendar of Events

MPACT Training for Parents

– March 12, 2005

9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

"Understanding the IEP Process." Boone County Group Home, 1209 E. Walnut, Columbia, MO.

– April 9, 2005

8:30 - 11:30 a.m.

"The Art of Effective Advocacy." Henry County Library, 123 E. Green Street (Friends Room), Clinton, MO.

Power Up 2005

April 18-29, 2005

Tan-Tar-A, Osage Beach, MO (Missouri Assistive Technology Advisory Council)

Sessions will provide up-to-date information on disability related policy, assistive technology services and devices, independent living issues, educational policy and practices, and information technology accessibility to enhance and promote independence of people with disabilities. For more details, call Brenda at 1-800-647-8557 or 1-800-647-8558 (TTY within Missouri). www.at.mo.gov/Powerup2005/powerup.shtm

Autism Symposium

May 19-21, 2005

Tan-Tar-A, Osage Beach, MO (Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities) This workshop is helpful for parents and professionals. For more details, call 573-751-9687 or 1-800-364-9687.

(If the bus lift can be operated without the engine running, the driver may be the person operating the lift.) The wheelchair brakes are applied when the wheelchair is on the lift and one of the bus team should maintain hand contact with the wheelchair when the lift is moving. No one should ever ride up or down on the lift beside the wheelchair.

- The attendant assists ambulatory students on and off the bus.
- For students who do not ride in their wheelchair during the route, the attendant transfers students from the wheelchair to the bus seat or car seat and vice versa.
- The bus team takes from and delivers to the parents any medications which travel back and forth between home and school. These are stored in a locked box on the bus.
- During the journey, the bus attendant repositions students as needed in bus seats, car seats or wheelchairs (training in repositioning is provided by the school).
- The bus attendant performs self-care tasks on the route, such as wiping noses, cleaning up a student who may have vomited, or helping to keep students warm or cool (with guidance provided by the school on procedures).
- The bus team does not smoke at any time before, during or after the journey, on or close to the school bus.

The bus route:

- At the beginning of each school year, the school principal, the bus contractor (if any) and the bus teams work out the most efficient way to pick up the students at each school. The principal/school office will contact the parents with the anticipated morning pick-up time and afternoon drop-off time. It is generally a few days into the school year before the times are finalized, and they are subject to change at any time during the year as students are added or removed from the route, or the routes are reconfigured. The school office will notify affected families when changes occur.
- Bus routes are generally configured to pick up students based on geographic location, with the students who live furthest from the school being picked up first and dropped off last. Bus teams should not be requested by parents to pick up students out of sequence to make the pick-up and drop-off times fit the parents' schedules.
- In the morning, if the bus is on time or running early, it is required to wait at your house for your student to load until three minutes after the designated pick-up time and then leave. If the bus is running late, it is required to wait three minutes after it arrives before leaving.
- In the afternoon, the above policy also applies. If no one is home to receive the student, the bus must wait three minutes beyond the designated drop-off time or three minutes after arrival if the bus is running late. If no one is available by the time the bus must leave, it will continue with the route, and the driver will notify the school and terminal (if any) that your child could not be delivered home. The school and/or terminal will call ahead to your alternate drop off locations, and an attempt will be made to drop off the student where someone is available. If this fails, and the school or bus contractor cannot contact you, the bus team will follow the school's policy, which may include returning the student to school or contacting the local law enforcement agency.
- All buses are required to stop at each pick-up location every day, unless told by the school office that this is not required due to a known student absence.
- The bus is expected to travel the route in the sequence approved by the school, and the bus team is not allowed to change the route without discussing this in advance with the school principal.

What the schools expect of the parents:

- When the school gives you the designated pick-up and drop-off times, it is expected that you will have your child fully dressed and ready before that time and that you will be home, ready for the drop-off no later than the afternoon time. The three-minute allowance is to provide a leeway for unexpected occurrences.
- If it is difficult to get your child ready in the morning, you can check whether the school has a home school coordinator who can give you some tips on ways to organize the process.
- Should your child have an accident immediately before the bus arrives, send out another family member to explain what has happened and ask the bus to wait while your

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A section of the newsletter is intended to answer questions commonly raised by parents. Questions should be forwarded to Stephanie Brooks at the address below.

student changes into clean clothes. If you are home by yourself, try to work out a signal with the bus team to indicate there will be a brief delay in coming to the bus, and to wait a few minutes for your child to be ready.

- If you are delayed getting home in the afternoon, call the school to let them know as soon as possible, and let them know who is going to receive your child, so the bus can be rerouted to your alternate address.
- If you are changing residence, let the school office know as early as possible, and give them the date of the move, the new address, any directions for locating the new residence, and any change in phone number. This information should be called into the school office, and the bus team will be notified by the school. Parents without access to a phone can send a written note with the student or give it to the driver for delivery to the school office.
- If you need to change the morning or afternoon location for pick-up or drop-off, this change must be discussed with the school principal. The school attempts to assist any permanent arrangement, such as pick-up at the home, but drop-off at a relative's home or daycare. If the arrangement is temporary, the principal will let you know if this is possible.
- Advise the school office if your child is absent due to sickness or other reasons. Give advance notice where possible for planned absences. This notice helps with the rescheduling of buses. Notify the office when you expect your student to return to school, so that the bus will resume coming to your home.
- If the names, addresses or phone numbers supplied on the alternate drop-off form change during the year, please complete a new form, so the bus team knows where to take your child if you are not home.
- Transportation services are provided as outlined in the student's IEP. If curb to curb service is designated for your student, the bus is required to stop in front of your home and on the same side of the street as your home. If a bus team at any time suggests or requires that you take your student to any other location than in front of the home, contact the school office and talk with the principal. You may volunteer to take your student to a more convenient pick-up site, for example, to a nearby store or parking area. However, you are not required to agree to this.
- Parents are not to board the bus unless this is pre-arranged with the school and bus company for a specific reason. The bus attendant will assist ambulatory students with boarding and leaving the bus.
- Wheelchairs must be maintained with functioning brakes and straps. If you need assistance with repairs, the school may be able to help you obtain this.
- If your child has a behavior support plan related to transportation services, the school will let you know how you can help with this plan. This might involve letting your child bring a favorite object, magazine, etc. on the route, or providing a reinforcement for your child after appropriate behavior on the ride home.
- If you notice that the bus company is not providing the services outlined above, notify the school office. We also like to hear about positive experiences you have had with the bus team.

If you have questions about the transportation services provided, please contact your school principal for assistance. ■

STATE SCHOOLS FOR SEVERELY HANDICAPPED Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Web site: dese.mo.gov/divspeced/stateschools/

NOTE: If you have items of interest for the *Parent Focus*, please call 573-751-0706 (Missouri Relay 800-735-2966) or forward them to: Stephanie Brooks, State Schools for Severely Handicapped, P.O. Box 480, Jefferson City, Missouri 65102-0480. E-mail: Stephanie.Brooks@dese.mo.gov